

SOME THOUGHTS ON SANCTIFICATION

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"Deal bountifully with Thy servant that I may live and keep Thy word. Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law. I am a sojourner in the earth; hide not Thy commandments from me. My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto Thine ordinances at all times. ... Thy testimonies also are my delight and my counsellors." Psalm 119:17-20,24

In John 17 verse 1 Christ prays for Himself: "Glorify Thy Son that Thy Son might glorify Thee." In verse 6 He prays for His disciples: "I have manifested Thy name unto the men whom Thou gavest Me"; verse 9, "I pray [or ask] for them." Then in verse 20 He prays for those who will believe on Him: "Neither pray I for these alone but for them also who believe on Me through their word."

One of the things that the Lord prays concerning His disciples is found in verse 17, and it is that verse that I want consider this morning. Our Lord prays, "Sanctify them through Thy truth, Thy word is truth." There is a lot of confusion about what the Scripture presents as sanctification, and I want to tell you what I think the Word teaches about sanctification.

Sanctification basically means to "set apart." If you were to drop in at the Bishop apartment while we are having lunch, we would invite you to sit down with us. If you would look at the table you might notice that Mrs. Bishop and I have knives that look alike but but that the forks have different designs. The reason for that is that one time in the mail there came a fork and I'm using it. About a year later another one came and she's using that, so that while our knives are alike our forks are not alike. Then if you looked at the teaspoons, those two came from a set sometime way back when. But if we should invite you to visit us for a meal you would find that all our tableware, or at least most of it, is a matched set. That's a sanctified set of tableware. It is set it apart for company. That setting apart is back of the idea of sanctification in the Scriptures.

I want to read a couple of verses that are somewhat self-explanatory. There are certain **things** in the Scriptures that are sanctified, or set apart. "And Moses took the anointing oil and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein and sanctified them." (Leviticus 8:10) The tabernacle was set apart for a particular purpose. So in the Scriptures some things are sanctified.

Not only are some **things** sanctified but also some **persons** are sanctified. "And the Lord spoke unto Moses saying, 'Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel both of man and of beast, it is Mine.'" (Exodus 13:2) There

are people who are set apart. The background of that is the time of the exodus from Egypt. You remember that God said they were to sprinkle some blood on the doorposts and on the lintels, and "when I pass over" (not the death angel but the Lord Himself passed over) "and where I see the blood I will pass over you" -- there will be no death of the firstborn. That is exactly what happened. They sprinkled the blood and the firstborn were saved. In the households, especially of the Egyptians, where the blood was not sprinkled, the firstborn died. Now God says, because I saved that firstborn, they belong to Me. That is what He is saying in Exodus 13:2 -- they are sanctified, they are set apart for Me. A little later on God says that in place of these firstborn He will take the tribe of Levi and they will be set apart in a special way. Even the Lord when He was an infant was taken by Mary to Jerusalem in order that He might be released from this rule that God had made back here in Exodus. So, there were things set apart for the Lord and there were people set apart for the Lord.

In the New Testament there is some additional work of the Holy Spirit in connection with believers. It was to that especially that the Lord addressed Himself here as He spoke to the disciples.

There is a past sanctification. In Hebrews 10:10 Paul writes, "By which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." I'm reading from the King James Bible and I believe in it, but I'd like to make a suggestion here. That word "are" -- "we are sanctified" -- happens to be a perfect participle and therefore in a newer translation it may read a little more clearly, "by which will we have been sanctified." Notice how, "through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" -- past sanctification by the death or, if you please, the blood of Christ.

Go with me to I Corinthians 1:2. Paul is writing "unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that [again we have the same construction as in Hebrews 10:10] have been sanctified in Christ Jesus [the King James reads] called to be saints." In the King James Bible you will notice the words "to be" are in italics. In the King James Bible, when the words are in italics it's not like the fellow says, "When they's in italics that's when I shouts the loudest 'cause they's the most important." When they are in italics it means they do not occur in the original and there are times when leaving them out gives better sense.

Let me read that again: "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that have been sanctified in Christ Jesus called saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." You remember Romans 10:13, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." So the Apostle Paul is writing to every saved person, and he's saying here "every saved person is a saint". You don't have to wait until you die to be a saint, you don't have to wait until someone prays you out of some place or other to be a saint. If you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ you are a saint now, and as a saint, you have been sanctified -- past tense -- every believer has been sanctified.

That's our standing before God. I repeat, as a believer you have been sanctified, you have been set apart for Him.

You are familiar with the character of the Corinthians. They were certainly far from living a holy life. They were arguing with each other, they were having relationships in the family which were far from God-honoring. And yet they were saints, and they had been sanctified. Regardless of the plane on which they were living, they were in a standing before God that was a sanctified standing by the blood of Christ.

There is a present sanctification as well. That's what our Lord is praying for in connection with the disciples here in John 17. "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth." So, there is a past sanctification by the death of Christ -- there is a present process of sanctification by the Word. This is one of the very important reasons for having daily devotions and daily personal Bible study, because it's through the Word of God that we are instructed in the way we ought to go and the way we ought to think. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his ways? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word." (Psalm 119) And I'm sure if he were asked he'd say not only young men but women as well -- the idea of cleansing by the Word.

We looked briefly the other day at the denials of Peter, and we'll mention that again when we come to chapters 18 and 19, but the Lord said to Peter, "Peter, you're going to deny Me three times." And then as you go through the trial of Christ you find that's exactly what happened. And then there's a very touching verse of Scripture in Luke where as Christ turned and looked at Peter, he remembered the word of the Lord and he went out and wept bitterly. That word of the Lord touched his heart and cleansed him from what he had done wrong just a few moments before, and that was a part of the process of Peter's present sanctification.

Now, that's our state -- it is not up to our standing -- we are being sanctified by the Word. I mentioned a moment ago the Corinthians. They were certainly far from living a holy life for the Lord. They had a proper standing but their state was not what it should have been. I think that's true of all of us -- we have ups and downs in our Christian life -- we need to be mindful of that and I'm sure we are as we're sensitive to the work of the Holy Spirit. At the present time we are being set apart from evil unto righteousness by His grace by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. That is our experience, that is our problem with the two natures, but it is a present process -- we are being sanctified.

Q. Can you translate the word "sanctify" by "make holy"?

A. We might have a tendency to do that, but that is not correct. Christ on one occasion said, "I sanctify Myself." He was as holy as you can get. So sanctification is not a matter of making holy. As we set ourselves apart to the Lord, holiness results.

The third aspect of sanctification is future. There is a future sanctification. Please turn to I Thessalonians 5:23: "And the very God of peace sanctify you entirely, and I pray God your whole Spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I suggest a more literal reading there: not "unto the coming," but "in" the bodily presence of the Lord, or "at the coming of the Lord." I'll read the verse again: "And may the God of peace sanctify you entirely, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is a future sanctification, a work which will be completed at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. I John 3 says, "We shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is." The Greek has two different words for "like." One is "homo," and one is "homoi" -- and the difference is important. "Homo" means "identical" -- "homoi" means "like" or "similar." Which one does John use in I John 3? "We shall be like Him" -- we shall be "homoi" -- similar, not identical.

Christ is indeed God in human flesh, without sin. We'll not be like that, but we'll be similar to Him in that the old nature will be gone. No more problems with sin. Our state will reach our standing, and it will be perfect. We will be complete in Him when He returns. Sometimes I wish, for selfish reasons, that He would hurry and bring that about. But whenever that is, our future sanctification will have been complete.

Christ prayed for His disciples, primarily for their present sanctification. "Sanctify them through Thy word, Thy word is truth."

So there are three phases to sanctification. Our standing before God when we receive Christ as our personal Saviour is due to what Christ did on the cross. Our state is what we are at the present time, hoping it will be improved by the work of the Word in our lives. Our future sanctification when our state will have grown up to our standing by the presence of the Lord.

Prayer: Our Father, we thank You for the work that You have begun to perform in us, in the promise that You will complete it at the day of redemption. Thank You for the promise of the soon coming of our Lord. Help us to live even today in light of it. Lord, we're not praying lightly. We believe that even today You might break the blue and call us unto Yourself. Watch over us while we are apart, for we ask it in our Saviour's precious name. Amen.